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PREPARATIONS FOR THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT ON THE BASIS OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 44/228 and TAKING INTO ACCOUNT OTHER RELEVANT ASSEMBLY RESOLUTIONS: CROSS-SECTORAL ISSUES

OTHER LEGAL, INSTITUTIONAL AND RELATED MATTERS, AS WELL AS LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL ASPECTS OF CROSS-SECTORAL ISSUES

Role of regional organizations and cooperation

(Section IV, Chapter 7 of Agenda 21)

Report of the Secretary-General of the Conference

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present document responds to Preparatory Committee decision 3/2, entitled "Structure and organization of Agenda 21" (see A/46/48 (Part II), annex I), in addressing the role of regional organizations and activities in relation to capacity-building. Although all chapters of Agenda 21 include references to regional cooperation and many programme areas also suggest such actions, it was deemed appropriate to prepare a brief paper on the role of regional organizations and cooperation. Other documents of relevance to this

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* See A/CONF.151/PC/96.

issue are "National mechanisms and international cooperation for capacity building in developing countries" (A/CONF.151/PC/100/Add.11), as well as the synthesis report on national-level activities as reflected in the national reports, which often refer to regional or intercountry issues.

II. PROGRAMME AREA

A. Basis for action

2. While most of the follow-up actions under Agenda 21 will be dealt with at the national level, almost all programme documents refer to regional requirements and cooperation, the need for regional centres of excellence, exchange of information, data collection etc. National-level capacity of countries is vital to the implementation of national policies, plans and programmes, and these capacities need to be strengthened. Regional activities are expected to increase because of the nature of environmental problems that know no boundaries, and thus regional organizations should be strengthened or restructured.

B. Objectives

1. Long-term objectives

3. Consolidation and harmonization of regional and subregional activities and actions are necessary. The large number of follow-up actions require better coordination than ever before. The core organizations within the United Nations system are UNDP, UNEP and the regional commissions. In addition, specialized agencies and regional development banks have an important role to play. Modification and strengthening of mandates of these agencies or organizations may result.

2. Short-term objectives

4. Each Member State should complete its own Agenda 21, for implementation of decisions taken at the Conference, by 1994. It is equally important for regional organizations, within the same time-frame, to review and prepare their agendas in coordination with national priorities.

5. The Secretary-General of the United Nations may be requested to prepare a complementary report to be submitted to the General Assembly at its fiftieth session on consultations among regional organizations, international organizations, donor agencies and private sector partners containing proposals for regional level coordination, with clearly defined responsibilities and possible changes to mandates.

C. Activities

1. Review and strengthen regional strategies for sustainable development

6. Organizations functioning at the regional level and regional programmes should address the issue of how to support, improve and strengthen regional and subregional consultative processes. The purpose is to assist with regional and subregional programme implementation in support of Governments which are preparing policies and programmes needed for the next generation to implement its Agenda 21, at all levels in society. The regional commissions and other regional programmes of the United Nations system, as well as other regional organizations, should review the need for modification of ongoing activities, as appropriate in light of the Agenda 21, once approved.

2. Strengthen existing regional organizations

7. There are a variety of regional organizations ranging from political defence organizations and economic market organizations to regional environmental entities. While these all have their mandate, most will require some internal adjustments to meet the new challenges introduced in Agenda 21. Therefore the following is proposed:

(a) Organizations with an economic orientation should strengthen the environmental and sustainable development aspects of their activities and programmes;

(b) Organizations with an environmental orientation should strengthen the developmental aspects of their activities;

(c) The capacities of the relevant regional organizations and institutions should be strengthened to enable them to carry out these new and expanded functions as part of the capacity-building programme (see also A/CONF.151/PC/100/Add.11).

3. Harmonization and cooperation between regional organizations

8. Efficient cooperation between regional organizations and programmes of the United Nations system, as well as other regional organizations dealing with sustainable development, is necessary to avoid duplication of efforts, as well as for reasons of economy. Bilateral aid agencies should be encouraged to cooperate more closely with these regional entities.

9. The regional commissions of the United Nations system, UNEP and UNDP form the core group, and together with the regional development banks, should bear special responsibility for such coordination.

10. The regional commissions with mandates essentially for economic and social development have a particular responsibility in these fields, which should be complemented with UNEP's know-how and role in the field of environment and UNDP's designated role as coordinator of United Nations system technical cooperation. The commissions have taken steps to modify their mandates in relation to environmental matters. These United Nations system bodies all report to the Economic and Social Council, where the respective areas of responsibility could be reviewed during 1994 prior to the Secretary-General's report to the Assembly at its fiftieth session. The regional development banks, while having close contacts with the United Nations system and having a different reporting responsibility, could provide financial support and know-how. Their role in this undertaking would have to be clarified.

11. The member States belonging to the regional entities concerned should agree on the appropriate coordinating mechanism at the regional level.

4. Improve the process of joint action at regional level

12. Coordination should be improved between these organizations and their respective activities. What is needed is more "joint action" to address effectively sustainable development. This should also include the regional development bank, the World Bank and bilateral aid agencies in an appropriate way, perhaps in the form of round table or special regional or subregional consultative meetings.

13. UNDP should be designated as the lead agency to coordinate global action of the core group, given its ongoing capacity-building initiative and national-level responsibility as well as involvement, for instance, in the African Capacity Building Initiative. Within each region the regional commissions should be designated as support agents to gather the information required for the report.

14. Alternatively, a lead agency from outside the United Nations system of organizations could be chosen, the main concern being that the organization have the capacity and desire to undertake the study. The support agencies could also be non-United Nations agencies and may vary from region to region.

5. Coordinate and harmonize subregional activities

15. Particular attention should be given to subregional activities and programmes. These activities, often based on eco-geographical realities, emerging naturally from within the communities, form strong and viable building blocks. Such activities and programmes are often linked to river basins, island countries, desert countries, etc. They are often strong enough to survive even armed conflicts. The review of regional concerns and capacities should not be restricted by existing political and geographical boundaries. While recognizing the sovereignty of nations, environmental

concerns within countries and their neighbours should allow for the formation of new groupings for the purpose of addressing sustainable development.

16. The role of the non-government sector on a regional level should also be included in an effective manner.

D. Means of implementation

17. For the purpose of this study it is suggested that the lead agency and the support agencies, if they are part of the United Nations system, be provided with funding for the hiring of temporary staff or consultants.